

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 108 810

RC 008 615

AUTHOR Orvik, James M.
 TITLE Definitions of Bilingual Education in Alaska.
 PUB DATE Mar 75
 NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology (34th, Amsterdam, March 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.76 HC-\$1.58 PLUS POSTAGE
 DESCRIPTORS *American Indians; *Bilingual Education;
 *Bilingualism; Concept Formation; *Definitions;
 Language Instruction; Literature Reviews;
 Sociolinguistics; *Typology
 IDENTIFIERS *Alaska

ABSTRACT

"Bilingual education" is among the new technical terms which claim to add efficiency, precision, and clarity to an otherwise complex existence. The practitioner has the responsibility of making its definition useful--precise and comprehensive. For Alaska, a useful definition of "bilingual education" must be flexible enough to meet the specific needs of each community. Two things must be considered: (1) the bilingual situation in a particular community and (2) the kind of language program appropriate to that situation. This paper explores the usefulness of various definitions of "bilingual education", emphasizing their meaningfulness for multiple audiences, consumers as well as educational and political practitioners in Alaska's multilingual environment. Various conditions under which the term "bilingual education" is currently being used in Alaska are described. (NQ)

 * Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
 * materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
 * to obtain the best copy available. nevertheless, items of marginal *
 * reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
 * of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
 * via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
 * responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
 * supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *

Definitions of Bilingual Education in Alaska¹

James M. Orvik

Center for Northern Educational Research
University of Alaska



ED108810

Definitions are not always clear, nor is it always clear just why definitions are necessary. The paradox of definitions lies in their being simultaneously necessary and useless. A sandwich may be defined as "two adjacent slices of bread separated by a comestible", but try to order one by its definition and you may get hungry, if not assaulted. We communicate by words not by their definitions but without definitions, words would be arbitrary, and hence, useless.

One of the joys of our lifetime has been the passing parade of new technical terms claiming to add efficiency, precision, and clarity to an otherwise complex existence. While no field is immune to neologisms; the practitioner in any field has the responsibility of making its definitions useful. By useful, I mean precise and comprehensive.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the usefulness of various attempts to define "bilingual education" with particular emphasis placed on their meaningfulness for multiple audiences; consumers as well as educational and political practitioners in Alaska's multilingual environment.

Before proceeding to the definitions and their evaluation, let me first give you some background about the nature and extent of bilingualism in Alaska. This background will also describe the various conditions under which the term "bilingual education" is currently being used, appropriately or not.

¹ Presented at the 34th Annual Meeting, Society for Applied Anthropology, Amsterdam, March, 1975.

Bilingualism in Alaska

First, let me describe some general patterns of bilingualism in rural Alaska. Urban Alaska, though confronted with bilingualism represents sociolinguistic patterns beyond the scope of the present paper. A straight forward definition of bilingualism is given by Weinreich as "the practice of alternately using two languages ...", the person involved being called bilingual (Weinreich, 1954). But beyond the simple and straight forward there lies considerable complexity. Language use for any particular person may also involve the relative levels of competence in understanding languages heard (receptive skills), as well as the ability to produce languages (expressive skills) for communicating. Expressive skills may be further elaborated as speaking and writing skills; and receptive skills may also include reading in addition to listening skills.

In the case of bilingualism these definitional refinements are important because they require a closer look at the individual, since there are obviously many ways a person can practice the use of two (or more) languages. There is also educational importance insofar as the business of education is to develop proficiency. If there is more than one way of being proficient, then there are a like number of jobs to which educators must attend.

Linguists vary in the amount of proficiency a person must show before he can be called bilingual. On one end of the spectrum, Bloomfield (1933), claims equal and native-like proficiency must be shown before one may be called bilingual, whereas Diebold (1968), at the other end, suggests only passive (receptive) ability need be shown in a second language to qualify.

For Alaska, a useful definition of bilingualism should allow us to describe meaningfully as many bilingual persons and bilingual contexts as

possible. Therefore, for purposes of practical application, it is probably the wisest course to accept the least conservative definition (Diebold's) as the most useful because it allows for the most sensitive system possible for describing bilingualism in Alaska.

Krauss (1973) has employed a system for describing Alaskan communities according to their level of native language use, not inconsistent with the above definition requirements. The system classes each native community as one of three possible types:

- Type A. Monolingual Native: (fluent native-language speakers of all ages, including all or many children),
- Type B. Bilingual: (few or no speakers under 10 years of age),
- Type C. Monolingual English: (few or no speakers under 30 years of age).

A number of points should be made about the descriptive system to make clearer its educational importance. First, each type of community is "bilingual", even though two, types A and C, are listed as "monolingual". The key factor is language contact. Type A communities are in the constant position of contact with the national language, largely for purpose of commerce and other communication with the outside. Type C communities are generally in a state of transitional change away from a native language, the degree of transition varying from place to place. Table 1 shows the numbers of Alaskan communities of each type, by general language group.

Definitions of Bilingual Education

Given some understanding of the dimensions of bilingualism as a concept, and a cursory look at its distribution among Alaska's language groups, let us turn to definitions of bilingual education.

Table 1
Numbers of Alaskan Native
Communities by Language Group and Language Use

Language Use ^a	Language Group					Total
	Eskimo-Aleut	Athapascan-Eyak	Tsimshian	Haida	Tlingit	
Type A	31	5	0	0	0	36
Type B	40	7	0	0	0	47
Type C	54	39	1	2	13	109
Total	125	51	1	2	13	192

- a. A - All people speak the native language including children.
 B - Some children speak the native language.
 C - No children speak the native language.

In the Draft Guidelines for preparing program proposals under Title VII - Elementary and Secondary Education Act (1967 amendment), the following definition appears:

Bilingual education is instruction in two languages and the use of those two languages as mediums of instruction for any part or all of the school curriculum. Study of the history and culture associated with the student's mother tongue is considered an integral part of bilingual education. (1967, p. 1)

Similarly, Gaarder (1967) defined the bilingual school as one "which uses, concurrently, two languages as mediums of instruction in any portion of the curriculum." He goes on to say, "teaching of a vernacular solely as a bridge to another, the official language, is not bilingual education ..., nor is ordinary foreign language teaching."

The National Education Association's Task Force on Bilingual - Multicultural Education (1974) defined bilingual education as "a process which

uses a pupil's primary language as the principal medium of instruction while teaching the language of the predominant culture in a well-organized program encompassing a multicultural curriculum."

The fourth definition comes from the Education Amendments of 1974, enacted into law as U.S. Public Law 93-380 on August 21, 1974. It says, in part:

The term 'program of bilingual education' means a program of instruction designed for children of limited English-speaking ability in elementary or secondary schools, in which, with respect to the years of study to which such program is applicable--

- (1) there is instruction given in, a study of, English and, to the extent necessary to allow a child to progress effectively through the educational system, the native language of the children of limited English-speaking ability, and such instruction is given with appreciation for the cultural heritage of such children, and, with respect to elementary school instruction, such instruction shall, to the extent necessary, be in all courses or subjects of study which will allow a child to progress effectively through the educational system;

Implied in the first two definitions, and explicitly stated in the last two is the requirement that the child possess a primary native, or home language other than English, in order to be a legitimate target for bilingual education.

These definitions make clear the importance of the language as a medium of instruction not just as subject matter, in order to qualify as bilingual schooling. Stressing the point, Anderson and Boyer (1969) take care to note that English as a Second Language (ESL) programs, and cultural awareness programs are often mislabeled bilingual education. They made a needed point that "such indiscriminate use of the term renders it meaningless."

There are distinctions worth maintaining among types of bilingual programs, all of which may qualify under the above definition. Mackey (1969), addressed this problem by conceptualizing a typology of bilingual education

which accounts for ten basic curriculum patterns for five types of learners.

Beginning with the latter, Mackey sees the home and school language congruence as a key to typing bilingual education situations. The five types are:

1. Unilingual home: where the home language is the school language.
2. Unilingual home: where the home language is not the school language.
3. Bilingual home: both home languages include one school language.
4. Bilingual home: both home languages exclude school languages.
5. Bilingual home: both home languages include both school languages.

The ten curriculum patterns Mackey identifies vary according to five factors:

1. The medium of instruction may be one language, two languages, or more; in other words, the school may have a single medium or a dual medium curriculum;
2. The development pattern may be to maintain two or more languages, or to transfer from one medium of instruction to another;
3. The distribution of the languages may be to present different or equal amounts during the day;
4. The direction may be toward assimilation into a dominant culture, toward acculturation, or toward reintegration into a resurgent one, or it may be neither, but simply the maintenance of the languages at an equal level;
5. Finally, the change from one medium to another may be complete or gradual.

It should be pointed out that Mackey's typology is not consistent with the earlier definition in that two languages need not be present as mediums of instruction in order to be classified. The only requirement is for a bilingual context to exist either in the school, or in the interaction between the school and the learner's home, his community, or his country.

By so doing, Mackey created a comprehensive scheme capable of describing virtually all cases where bilingual schooling in some form may be relevant.

Unfortunately, while the above definitions and Mackey's typology account for all of the important forms a language-sensitive education program can take, none are designed to account for the social or political aspects of the situations in which the programs exist. Describing the educational intentions of program planners gives only a portion of the picture, leaving the practitioner unable to evaluate the appropriateness of the educational plan for its social context.

Recent works by Spolsky (1974), and Erickson (1974) draw attention to the social context of bilingual education by adding non-school factors to existing descriptive models. Erickson stresses the "political" factors entering the descriptive system, suggesting the "politics of speaking" in a community are important to evaluating the appropriateness of a particular education approach. To translate an example given in Erickson's account into the present discussion of descriptive systems, a program may be intended to have the effect of language maintenance, but without accounting for the social context establishing the program, it could literally succeed by failing or fail by succeeding. As Erickson states:

By analyzing the actual "politics of speaking" in a program, researchers could determine how much the formal curriculum and social organization of the program was fostering first language maintenance. In addition, and perhaps even more importantly, this approach to evaluation could determine whether or not the informal or "hidden" curriculum and social organization of the program was inadvertently discouraging students from using their first language, despite the best intentions of the staff, parents, and the students themselves.

Spolsky sought to develop a formal model to account for the total context of bilingual programming. The model is based on a hexagon, each side of which represents a set of important factors influencing the educational

program. The factors Spolsky considers important are labeled psychological, sociological, economic, political, religio-cultural, and linguistic. While each set has special significance for influencing the nature of an educational program, not all factors are equally important for all programs, and may even assume differential importance at different phases in the life of a single program.

The details of the descriptive systems offered by Spolsky and Erickson are too involved for the short introduction given here, and you are advised to pursue the source documents for further elaboration. The main reason for their being discussed is to give you some idea as to the complexity of the situations in which bilingual programs find themselves.

Limitations of the Definitions

Definitions of complex phenomena often risk having key limitations. Legend has it, for example, that one day Plato set the academy to defining man. After a full day's dialogue they settled tentatively on the definition "man is a featherless biped". The following day Diogenes appeared at the Academy with a plucked chicken, and stated, "Plato, here is your man". Plato sensed the problem lay in the overinclusiveness of the first attempt and so added the discriminating feature; "with broad nails". Man then was "a featherless biped with broad nails", a slight improvement.

The central limitation of all widely used definitions of bilingual education lies in their not properly accounting for cases where the children possess the residual effects of an indigenous language but are not able to speak it. In such cases the children may be every bit as estranged from school's standard English curriculum as children possessing a minority language. To their additional disadvantage, however, they have no

alternative language to which the school can turn to provide a meaningful educational experience. Furthermore, the school may tend to treat the children as if language were no factor since, if the children do not speak another language, the school is free to use standard English.

Native communities where the native language traditional to the area has been replaced by a nonstandard dialect of English are not rare in Alaska. Table 1 showed the number of communities within each of Alaska's language groups at general levels of native language strength. The overall percentage in Alaska of type C communities (where no children speak the native language) is about 57 per cent. If the number of communities where only some of the children speak the native language is added to that figure it rises to 81 per cent!

If we assume the vast majority of these communities to be in a state of linguistic and cultural transition, it follows that the children carry into their school years, residual effects, linguistic as well as cultural, capable of exercising profound influence on their ability and desire to function in a school environment comprising standard English consistently tangential to their life experiences.

With few exceptions (e.g. Kari and Spolsky, 1973), little is known about the sociolinguistic forces governing this transitional situation, making the job of creating a culturally and linguistically appropriate curriculum doubly difficult. As noted by Kari and Spolsky:

With a few distinguished exceptions, the student of an Amerindian language has paid little attention to the sociolinguistic situation of his informants, except to remark how few speakers there are or how poorly they remember the language. From their studies, one can learn incidentally about the language loss and destruction, but seldom are there indications of the process itself, of what other languages are adopted, or of the nature of bilingualism. Only very recently, with the impetus of

interest on the one hand in the ethnography of speech and on the other in bilingual education has there been a smattering of studies focusing on Amerindian bilingualism. (p. 1)

Since nearly all of Alaska's rural communities can be shown to be bilingual in some sense, it follows that, given the necessary sociolinguistic research, an appropriate program could be devised in which the native language occupies a significant role in the curriculum. Each community has different needs and desires where the native language is at issue. Thus, for Alaska, a useful definition of bilingual education must be flexible enough to meet the specific needs of each community. Two things must be considered; the bilingual situation in a particular community, and the kind of language program appropriate to that situation.

Table 2 lists the number of schools operated by the Alaska State Operated School System (ASOSS) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) by language situation and whether some form of bilingual programming currently is in operation, or expected to be in the near future. As can be seen, a sizeable proportion of situations still remain with unmet bilingual programming needs. Also, the proportion of current unmet needs in the type C communities where, understandably, the greatest potential controversy exists on the role of native languages in the curriculum. Clearly, in such cases, the native language would have to undergo extensive community-wide revival of a magnitude capable of sustaining it as an instructional medium. On the other hand teaching the native language as a second language (NSL) in such cases might well be considered an integral part of that aspect of the curriculum devoted to enriching the child's sense of cultural roots.

Definitions that rule "ordinary foreign language teaching" out as bilingual education do so because it is taught as a subject matter and not used as a medium of instruction. While it would follow, then, that NSL

Table 2
Numbers of ASOSS and BIA Alaskan Schools by
1974 language situation and bilingual program status

Agency	Language situation ^a							
	A		B		C			
	Total	No. with Bil. Program ^b	Total	No. with Bil. Program	Total	No. with Bil. Program	Total	No. with Bil. Program
ASSOS	15	10	17	7	66	35	98	52
BIA	25	10	15	1	12	0	52	11
Total ^c	40	20	32	8	78	35	150	63

a. Source: Krauss, Alaska Native Language Center Report, Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 1973.

b. Source: Personal communications with Kathy Perrin, ANEB; Frank Berry, JOM; Baxter Wood, ASSOS; and cross reference of various agency directories.

c. Information on Alaska independent school districts was unavailable at the time of this report.

programs would suffer the same exclusion logically, NSL is not inconsistent with the probable intent of all definitions of bilingual education.

Once again, quoting Gaarder (1967), the following is a main reason listed for using a minority community language in the school curriculum:

to avoid the alienation from family and linguistic community that is commonly the price of rejection of one's mother tongue and of complete assimilation into the dominant linguistic group. (emphasis added).

These purposes are well served if indigenous language teaching is included even where it no longer is used in the home, because in the home and in the child there may still reside a cultural, historical, and familial connection

with that language and its associated culture. Such connections are organic whereas the Alaska native child's potential connection to French, German, or Spanish are not. His native language, even though disused, is part of his emotional and cognitive structure in a way no other language, perhaps save English, could ever be.

References

- Anderson, T. and Boyer, M., ed., Bilingual Schooling in the United States, Vols. 1 and 2. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, Texas, 1970.
- Anderson, T. and Boyer, M., "Draft Guidelines to the Bilingual Education Programs", Bilingual Schooling in the United States, Vol. 1, 1970.
- Bloomfield, L., Language. New York: Holt, 1933.
- Diebold, A. R., The consequences of early bilingualism in cognitive development and personality formation. In Edward Norbeck, Douglas Price-Williams, and William M. McCord, eds., The Study of Personality: An Interdisciplinary Appraisal, New York: Holt, 1968.
- Erickson, F., The politics of speaking: an approach to evaluating bilingual-bicultural schools, The Generator, 4, 9-13, 1974.
- Gaarder, A. B., "Organization of the bilingual school", The Journal of Social Issues, 23, 111-120, 1967.
- Kari, J. and Spolsky, B., Trends in the Study of Athapaskan Language Maintenance and Bilingualism. Navaho Reading Study Progress Report, No. 21, The University of New Mexico, April, 1973.
- Krauss, M., The Alaska Native Language Center Report: 1973, The Alaska Native Language Center, University of Alaska, Fairbanks, 1973.
- Mackey, W. F., "A typology of bilingual education", in Anderson, T. and Boyer, M., Bilingual Schooling in the United States, Vol. 2, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, Texas, 1970.
- Spolsky, B., "American Indian Bilingual Education", Navajo Reading Study Progress Report, No. 24, The University of New Mexico, May, 1974.
- United States Congress, Public Law 93-380. 93rd. Congress, H. R. 69, August 21, 1974.
- Weinreich, V., Languages in Contact, Publications of the Linguistic Circle, 1, 1953.